The Pd/Fe interface in the epitaxial system Pd/Fe/GaAs(001)- 4 x 6

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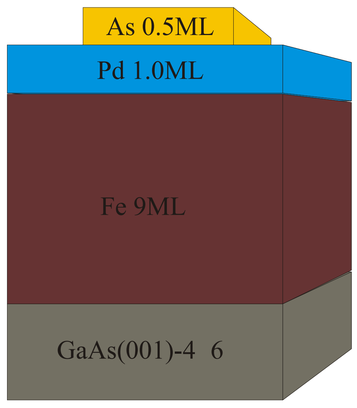
Introduction

The nature of the interface between epitaxially grown ferromagnetic/non-ferromagnetic bilayers plays an important role in the magnetic properties of spintronic devices. The operation of a spintronic device depends upon the efficiency with which an electron carries its spin through an interface. The efficiency is affected by interdiffusion between the layers, strain in the layers, and island formation. Understanding the structure is a critical component of developing the correct interpretation of the magnetic behaviour. Polarization-dependent XAFS in the total reflection mode provides a probe of these factors in both bare and buried interfaces. We have used the *in situ* MBE facility at the PNC/XOR beamline to deposit 1 ML of Pd on 9 ML of Fe epitaxially grown on the Ga-terminated 4 x 6 reconstructed surface of GaAs(001). At 9 ML the deposition of Fe is in the layer-by-layer growth mode and yet, is sufficiently thin that Fe K-edge XAFS measurements below the critical angle for total reflection still have some sensitivity to the Pd/Fe interfacial region. We discuss the differences in the Fe spectra collected before and after the deposition of Pd. We also discuss the evidence provided by Pd K-edge XAFS for the formation of Pd islands.



Methods and Materials

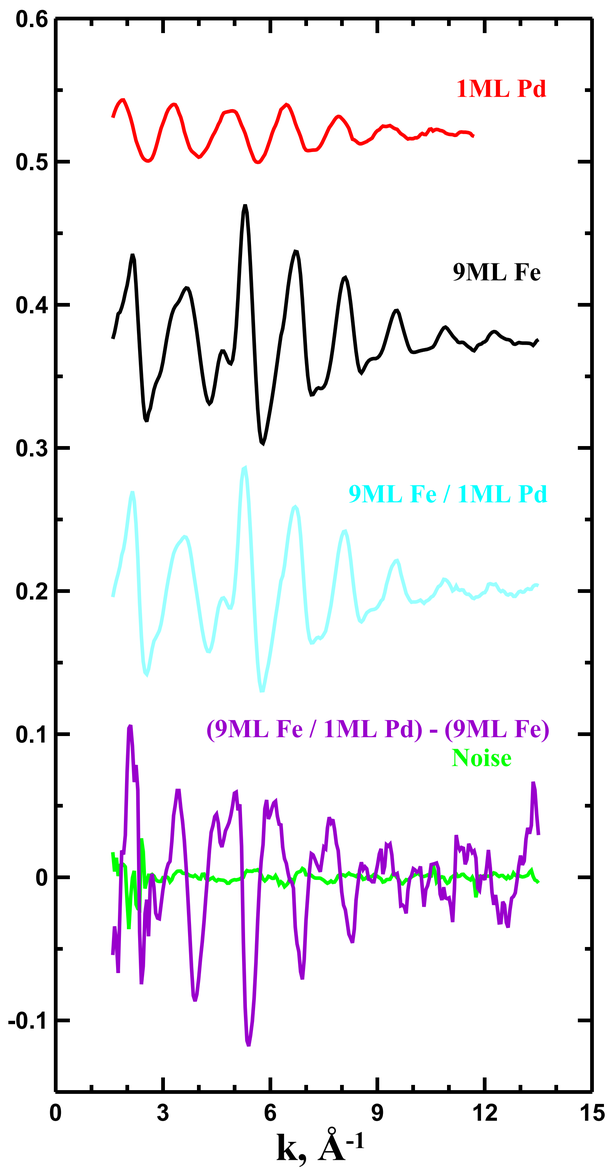
The sample on GaAs(001)-(4x6) was prepared *in situ* by MBE on epiready n-type GaAs (American Xtal Technology) wafers using methods described elsewhere [1,2]. Layer deposition was monitored by reflection high-energy electron diffraction (RHEED) with the number of oscillations of specular (anti-Bragg) spot intensity giving the layer thickness in ML.

In growing the Fe/Pd sample (left), a total of 9 ML of Fe were epitaxially deposited. Unlike previously [3], the Fe was not Ar+ sputtered to remove As which is known to float to the top of Fe during growth. Nor was the sample subsequently thermally annealed to reduce surface roughness.

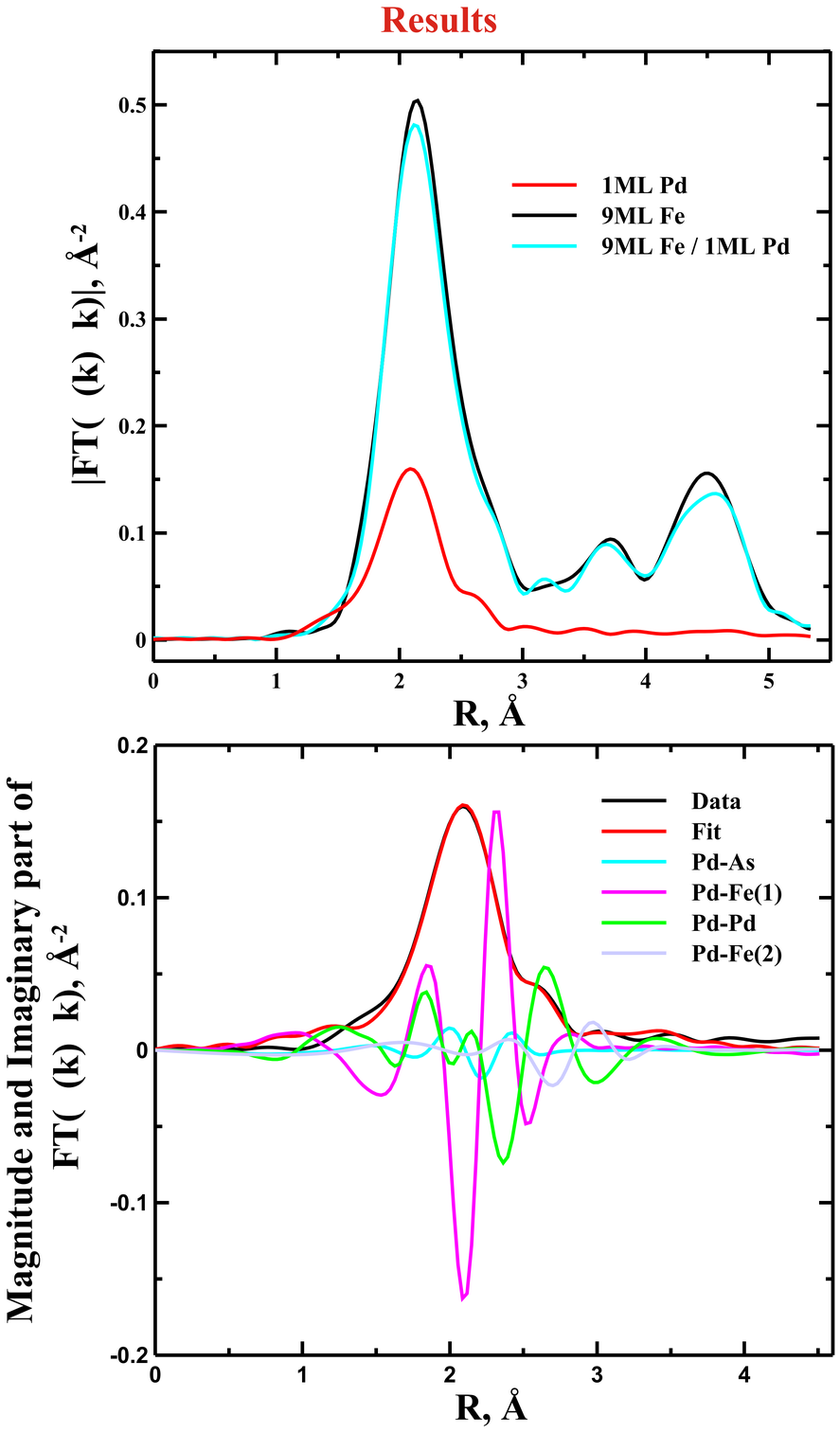
In the growth of Pd on bct Fe, the Pd fcc lattice can be considered as a bct structure with in-plane lattice parameter being smaller than the underlying Fe in-plane lattice. The Pd fcc lattice rotates 45º with respect to the Fe bct lattice and expands in-plane in an attempt to match Fe (shown below). This causes contraction in the out-of-plane direction at the same time.

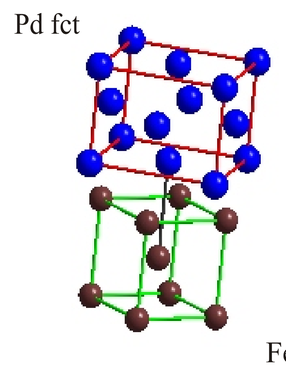
XAFS measurements were made at Fe and Pd K edges using the PNC-CAT undulator beamline, ID-20 [4]. X-rays were incident in the total-reflection geometry with the electric vector (near) perpendicular, **E** . To minimize distortion of the spectra due to anomalous dispersion effects in the sample and adjacent media, the angle of incidence was set to approximately 2/3 of the critical angle $_{C,}$ at 250 eV above the respective K-edges [5]. Fe K-edge measurements were also made at ~2 $_{c}$ after deposition of 1 ML Pd in order to examine the effect of the overlayer of Pd on the structure of the underlying Fe.

Results



The **E** (k) for Fe (before and after Pd deposition) and Pd K-edges are shown above. The difference between the two Fe (k) is shown together with the noise level included for comparison (both multiplied tenfold). The main contribution to the difference (k is caused by the dissimilarities "seen" by Fe atoms in the top few layers.





The magnitudes of the Fourier transforms of k (k for the Fe and Pd data are shown in the top figure on the left.

The fitting of 1ML Pd with the electric vector perpendicular to the substrate is shown in the bottom figure on the left. Due to the Fe surface roughness and presence of As at the surface, Pd does not form a perfect layer. This is evident from the presence of the Pd-Pd path under the fit - perfect 1 ML **E** data would not contain this path, since all Pd atoms would be in-plane.

Arsenic atoms from the Fe/GaAs interface tend to float to the top during growth of Fe and Pd. Up to 0.7ML of As have been reported to be present on top of relatively thick Fe layers. From the fit it is clear that such a small amount of As can be detected because the backscattering amplitude of As differs from both Fe and Pd.

There is a complex interplay between the Pd-Fe, Pd-As and Pd-Pd contributions to the main peak. While the Pd-Fe and Pd-Pd imaginary parts of the Fourier Transforms are in phase below 2 Å, they are out of phase just below 2.5 Å.

A reasonably good fit is obtained with the fit range from 0.9 Å to 3.2 Å. Fits to larger R are unreliable. This and large values of Debye-Waller factors indicate a significant disorder at the surface of the sample.

Conclusions

For an ideal perfectly flat 9 monolayers of Fe the theoretical first n.n. coordination number N_1 is 7.11. Experimentally N_1 = 6.7±1.0. For the second n.n. N_2 = 1.77 theoretically vs 1.5±0.2 experimentally. Radial distances are in agreement with a bct structure of Fe grown on GaAs-(4x6). From these values we estimate the Fe surface roughness to be ~ 2ML.

If the 1ML of Pd were perfectly flat there would be no out-of-plane Pd-Pd distance. But in the fit to the **E** Pd data a first n.n. Pd-Pd distance is present, indicating formation of Pd islands. Absence of a detectable second n. n. Pd distance suggests that the height of the islands does not exceed 2ML. This is consistent with the measured Pd-Pd N_1 =2.3±0.3. In addition, for the second Pd-Fe distance N_2 = 0.9±0.1, which means that almost all Pd atoms have such a bond with Fe.

The presence of a Pd-As distance in the fit, with small coordination number N_1 = 0.5±0.1 indicates at least 0.5ML of As floated to the surface of Pd during the growth. There may be additional As present on those patches of the Fe surface not covered by Pd. But As was not detected in the Fe K-edge fits, so the amount of As on Fe would be small.

Pd-Fe and Pd-As radial distances are equal to 2.61±0.02Å, which is the same as for Pd-Fe in the thicker films studied previously. This was expected since Fe and As have the same ionic radii. The Pd-Pd radial distance is found to be 2.81±0.02Å which is 0.02Å larger than in thicker samples.

The interfacial surface roughness affects greatly the magnetic properties of thin films such as coercivity, magnetic domain structure, and spin-transport. The investigated sample has greater surface roughness compared to samples prepared without omitting sputtering and annealing: ~2ML versus ~0.5ML. While there were no magnetic studies done on this sample, the obtained results can serve as a guide for preparing thin films with desired surface roughness.

References

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Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada through major facilities access and operating grants**.** Research at the PNC-CAT beamline, Advanced Photon Source, Argonne National Laboratory is also supported by the US Department of Energy under contracts W-31-109-Eng-38 (APS) and DE-FG03-97ER45628 (PNC-CAT).